

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7267
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, GY
SUBJECT: GUYANA MOVES ONE STEP CLOSER TO A NEW CONSTITUTION

REF: GEORGETOWN2307

1. ON FRIDAY, JULY 21, PARLIAMENT PASSED THE CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT BY FIFTEEN MONTHS. PARLIAMENT ALSO VOTED TO RESOLVE ITSELF INTO A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY FOR THE PUPOSE OF CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION (REFTEL). DURING THE DEBATE, WHICH WAS MARKED BY LIVELY EXCHANGES BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS, PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM AGAIN PLEDGED THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD WITHIN FIFTEEN MONTHS AND THAT THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WOULD CONSIDER MEMORANDA FROM ALL INTERESTED PERSONS CONCERNING THE NEW CONSTTUTION.

2. CHEDDI JAGAN, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) OFFERED AN AMENDMENT STIPULATING THAT THE NEW CONSTITUTION PREPARED BY THE ASSEMBLY BE RATIFIED BY
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A NATIONAL REFERENDUM, OBSERVED BY THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, AND MADE SUBJECT TO JUDICIAL REVIEW. IN REPLY, BURNHAM STATED THAT AS LONG AS HE WAS PRIME MINISTER HE WOULD NOT REDUCE GUYANA TO THE STATUS OF A COLONY BY INVITING ANY ORGANIZATION TO OBSERVE AN ELECTION OR REFERENDUM. THE AMENDMENT WAS DEFEATED BY THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS, WHICH CONTROLS

TWO -THIRDS OF THE VOTE IN PARLIAMENT.

3. EARLIER, DURING THE DEBATE OVER THE CONSTITUTION BILL, JAGAN CHARGED THAT THE GOG HAD VIOLATED UN DECLARATIONS ON HUMAN AND POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS BY FAILING TO HOLD FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS. IN HIS REBUTTAL, BURNHAM REJECTED ALLEGATIONS OF VOTE FRAUD, AND STATED THAT "EVEN BY ANDREW YOUNG'S DEFINITION", GUYANA HAD NO POLITICAL PRISONERS.

4. TAKING THE OFFENSIVE, THE PRIME MINISTER CHARGED THAT THE PPP HAD DECIDED TO BOYCOTT THE JULY 10 REFERENDUM ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM A FOREIGN POWER. WHEN ASKED BY THE OPPOSITION IF THE FOREIGN POWER WAS THE CIA, BURNHAM REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO REVEAL HIS SOURCE. MEMBERS OF THE PPP THEN ACCUSED BURNHAM OF BEING IN LEAGUE WITH THE CIA.

5. COMMENT: THE ISSUE OF FOREIGN "IMPERIALIST" INVOLVEMENT, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT, IN GUYANA'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS HAS NEVER DIED DOWN FROM THE 1960S. BOTH THE PNC AND PPP OFTEN TAR EACH OTHER WITH THE BRUSH OF FOREIGN DOMINATION. THE PPP, HOWEVER, CLEARLY INTENDS TO USE RENEWED WORLD INTEREST IN HUMAN RIGHTS AS A WEAPON IN ITS TRADITIONAL MARXIST-LENINIST ATTACKS ON THE BURNHAM REGIME. END COMMENT.
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